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In the **GREEN**

Recent media is rife with stories about organizations that are going green—so much so that the pressure to incorporate sustainability initiatives is greater than ever before. Economic challenges, limited funding and competition between maintenance and capital projects are some of the factors which drive organizations to concentrate on prioritizing and optimizing their efforts in this arena.

No matter what sector—whether it is federal, state and local government, corporate, education or health care—organizations need the ability to optimize their capital investments, ultimately resulting in more sustainable facilities.

Optimizing the Investment: Supporting Sustainable Facilities

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While having a broad umbrella approach to sustainability (including energy, water, indoor environmental quality, site sustainability, and materials and construction) is important, the recent focus has been on prioritizing sustainability projects which provide a clear return on investment.

Organizations are more involved in defining real-life practical ways to fund and accomplish their overall greening goals—while at the same time maintain-

ing the desired condition of their facilities within a given budget.

In order to optimize sustainable capital investments, there are four important considerations:

- Mission and mandate;
- Improved efficiency;
- Day-to-day operations; and
- Long-range planning.

Following these fundamentals enables an organization to successfully integrate sustainability goals into their facility capital planning process. The importance of these steps was shown at Salem State College, which was named one of the top 50 schools in the United States “that will help your kids help the planet” (Kiwi Green College Report). Its facility group integrated sustainability into its ongoing capital planning by undertaking a program which included concurrent green building and facility condition assessments.

With detailed information about the costs and benefits of potential green investments, Salem State was able to evaluate alternative options against the backdrop of its traditional choices. Because of this, the school has positioned itself to receive additional funding and is undertaking a new round of integrated assessments. This will continue to evolve its daily and long-term practices into a more sustainable, more cost effective and more environmentally responsible program. In this way, Salem State has been able to accomplish both its fiscal and organizational goals while maintaining the condition of its facility portfolio. Consider the success of Salem State and other organizations in relation to these four fundamental considerations.

Mission and mandate

The foundation of any green program is based on an organization’s mission as well as any compliance requirements that must be met. Once the mission is clearly understood, it is possible to create a framework from which to make key decisions. Recommendations for sustainable actions can then be prioritized in support of these goals.

Improved efficiency

Efficiency is a key area of focus—targeting which actions will reduce operating costs while conserving resources. Organizations may want to consider assessing their current facilities in order to define key opportunities for saving energy and conserving water, which can result in a wealth of efficiency improvements.

Day-to-day operational decisions

Consider the impact of daily operational decisions on both sustainability and the operating budget, and how alternative green actions can replace traditional, potentially inefficient choices. In every replacement scenario—whether it's a renewal, upgrade of equipment or replacement of finishes—there is an opportunity to implement green alternatives which can incrementally improve the sustainability of each facility without a major impact on day-to-day procedures.

Long-range planning

Faced with numerous challenges—especially lack of funding and emergency repair needs—the facility operations and maintenance world often focuses on day-to-day issues. Long-range planning enables an organization to be prepared for the future, whether that entails budget cuts or newly available funds. By surveying the facility portfolio, identifying the potential green opportunities, setting water and energy baselines, setting reduction targets and creating a sustainability implementation plan, organizations can balance short-term needs with long-term success. With sustainable policies, procedures and funding models in place, the long-term result will be increased cost savings over the life of the facilities.

Ultimately, focusing on these fundamentals results in an integrated approach to planning, budgeting and funding sustainability projects within the framework of a plan which meets the organization's goals and transforms the facility portfolio. Step by step, incremental change instituted over time will result in a more sustainable building portfolio which maximizes investment and supports the larger mission of any organization. **FMJ**



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